

BEWARE OF FRAUD, SCAMS WHEN SEEKING DISASTER ASSISTANCE

BISMARCK, N.D.—Residents of North Dakota affected by the severe storms and flooding beginning in mid-March are urged to report potential fraud during recovery and rebuilding efforts.

“The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) will never ask you for bank account information or your Social Security number unless you initiate the call,” said Federal Coordinating Officer Justo “Tito” Hernandez.

The only way to apply for federal and state disaster assistance is to call the FEMA registration number at **1-800-621-FEMA (3362)**, **TTY: 1-800-462-7585**, or register online at www.disasterassistance.gov.

When an individual calls the FEMA registration number, a FEMA operator will collect certain information such as Social Security numbers, bank and other personal information and provide the caller with an application number. Hernandez emphasized that individuals should not give personal information to anyone calling them on the telephone or showing up at their doorstep who claims to be an official but cannot prove their identity.

To safeguard against disaster-related fraud, officials recommend the following precautions:

- **Ask for ID.** If someone represents him or herself as a federal employee, such as an inspector, but does not produce identification, residents should ask to see it. A FEMA or U.S. Small Business Administration (SBA) shirt or jacket is not absolute proof of someone’s affiliation with the government. Federal employees carry official, laminated photo identification. Applicants may receive a visit from more than one inspector or verifier.
- **Safeguard personal information.** Do not give personal information such as Social Security and bank account numbers to individuals claiming to be affiliated with the federal government unless you initiate the call. FEMA inspectors who come to look at a building **never** require this information. A Social Security or bank account number is requested during the first phone call to the agency’s registration line. On any follow-up calls a FEMA representative may ask for the last four digits of an individual’s Social Security number.
- **Beware of people going door-to-door.** People going door-to-door to damaged homes, or phoning homeowners claiming to be building contractors, could be scam artists. If visitors or callers solicit personal information such as Social Security or bank account numbers, they may not be legitimate.
- **FEMA Community Relations staff** may visit homes, businesses or other locations to distribute flyers that mention personal information such as Social Security and bank account numbers. However, *they will not solicit this personal information from applicants*. They are merely providing guidance about what information applicants should have on hand to provide to FEMA when registering.
- **Federal workers** do not solicit or accept money. Remember, FEMA and SBA staff never charge applicants for disaster assistance, inspections or help in filling out applications. If in doubt, do not give out information and report people claiming to be government workers to local authorities.
- **FEMA inspectors verify damage**, but do not hire or endorse specific contractors to fix homes or recommend repairs.

Anyone in doubt about the authenticity of a FEMA or SBA representative may call the toll-free teleregistration number at **1-800-621-FEMA (3362)** and select the helpline option to speak with an operator. For those with a speech or hearing impairment call **TTY: 1-800-462-7585**.

Applicants are also urged to contact their local police department if they feel they have encountered a scam or other questionable service practice while attempting to get disaster assistance, as well as the Office of Attorney General, Consumer Protection division at **701-328-3404**, or toll-free: **800-472-2600**, **TTY: 800-366-6888**.